

The Story behind US 460

Early in the administration of Kentucky Governor Earle Clements (1947-1950), the state's chief executive visited Pike County to evaluate The Breaks area and its potential as a tourist attraction. Carried by automobile deep into the hills where Pike County meets Virginia, the Governor viewed the scenery through rainfall from a bumpy narrow road with deep drop offs just inches from the tires. "He could look out his window and see little margin for driver error between the road and the lovely gorge below. He is reported to have said, 'If I live to get out of here, I'll build you people a road.'"

Thus was born Kentucky Route 80, a two-lane winding access through Elkhorn City to Breaks Interstate Park, home of the largest canyon east of the Mississippi River and some of the most inspiring natural beauty anywhere. This state road today is woefully inadequate for the tens of thousands of visitors to The Breaks, which include whitewater rafters and kayakers as well as bird watchers, hikers, campers, and nature enthusiasts.

Happily, reconstruction of US 460 solves this problem! Funded by the state and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the new road runs east from US 23 south of Pikeville to Virginia where it will join a connector to that state's Coalfields Expressway. Along the way the road will provide access to Breaks Interstate Park from a new direction over a safe, modern four-lane highway.

The Jefferson National Forest forms Pike County's eastern boundary, the same stretch of mountains through which Daniel Boone first glimpsed Kentucky. Pine Mountain Trail State Park, a 125-mile linear park created in 2003 by the Kentucky General Assembly, will have its northernmost trail head in Elkhorn City.

Breaks Interstate Park, jointly created by the Virginia and Kentucky legislatures in 1954, offers potential for economic development through tourism, as does Fishtrap Lake and Wildlife Management Area, a US Army Corps of Engineers flood control project that will soon feature a Kentucky state park on its grounds. Access to both of these areas is dependent upon US 460.

A development area of 120 acres of usable land at John Moore Branch will be created with excess material from the US 460 excavation, the only such site in this section of the county. A bridge to the site is already complete. In addition, four of the remaining 17 sections of the massive project are under contract. The cost so far: \$21,352,279 in design, \$33,534,354 in right-of-way, \$1,331,505 in utilities, and \$94,227,612 in construction. Three more sections are scheduled for letting this year, and the total cost of the entire project is estimated at well over \$500 million.

The eastern Kentucky counties of Highway District 12 are a showcase of success for the Appalachian Regional Commission. For Pike County, completion of US 460 in a dozen or so years means that no part of the region remains isolated from any other part. Likewise, no part of eastern Kentucky is too remote to be reached by road with goods and services from anywhere in the United States. The mission and purpose of ARC's highway corridor development program has enabled this region to grow and prosper. The people of eastern Kentucky have more opportunity to benefit from easier, safer travel to other areas of the country. Visitors can now enjoy the beauty and majesty of the mountains as well as the friendliness of the people (we love company!) in less time and on modern, efficient, safe roadways.

**Pike County: A Very Different Place by William David Deskins, p. 165.*



Photos by John Michael Johnson, Project Manager

US 23 to Stagger Fork



Aerial of Sookey's Creek Bridge